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China is ready to consider allowing a U.S. diplomat to be posted in Tibet's capital of Lhasa even as the government tries to tamp down dissent and restore order after weeks of violent protests in the region, a Republican lawmaker said yesterday.

Rep. Mark Steven Kirk, Illinois Republican and co-chairman of the congressional U.S.-China Working Group, told The Washington Times he raised the issue in a meeting Wednesday evening with Chinese Ambassador Zhou Wenzhong.

"He was open to the idea. The door's open, and now we have to see what our government can do," said Mr. Kirk, who also serves on the House Appropriations subcommittee overseeing the State Department budget.

Western governments have struggled for information on Tibet after China cracked down on anti-government protests that began in Lhasa on March 10 and spread quickly to other ethnic Tibetan areas. Beijing says 22 people died in the clashes, but Tibetan activists and exile groups say at least 140 were killed and more than 1,200 arrested.

The special envoy for the Dalai Lama, Tibet's exiled spiritual leader, told a congressional panel that China was "playing a dangerous game" by trying to whip up anti-Tibetan sentiment in the country.

Lodi Gyari, the Dalai Lama's chief representative in dealing with Beijing, said China's communist leadership was "fully responsible" for the arrests and repression that have left the mountainous region "brutally occupied."

Mr. Gyari said he would welcome the idea of a U.S. diplomat posted in Lhasa, suggesting that Washington suspend approval for new Chinese consulates in the United States until an American diplomat was allowed into Tibet.

"Even if it is just one diplomat in one room, that would give confidence to the Tibetan people and more confidence and better information for the United States," the envoy said.

China accuses the Dalai Lama, living in exile in India since the 1950s, of fomenting the recent protests. Officials in Beijing yesterday announced plans to begin holding trials for the more than 1,200 protesters now in custody before the end of the month.

The Chinese government "is playing a very dangerous game," Mr. Gyari told a special briefing for the Congressional Human Rights Caucus, calling the situation in his homeland "grim." He denied the Dalai Lama favored independence for Tibet and said the exiled leader remained firmly committed to nonviolence.

"Chinese officials are trying to instigate in the minds of the people that the Tibetan movement is anti-Chinese. This is unforgivable, even unpatriotic, I would say," he added.

Mr. Gyari urged U.S. lawmakers to make an emergency fact-finding trip to Tibet and called for an international investigation into the violence.

Rep. Christopher H. Smith, New Jersey Republican and a leading voice on Capitol Hill on human rights issues, pressed for a U.S. boycott of the upcoming Olympic Games in China, citing the situation in Tibet and other Chinese human rights abuses.

Mr. Gyari, echoing the Dalai Lama, opposed an international boycott of the games, saying the event was important to the Chinese people as well as to the regime. But he said the Olympic torch should not be carried through Tibet on its way to the host city.

"This idea of taking the torch through Tibet, I really think, should be canceled because that would be very deliberately provocative and very insulting after what has happened," he said.

The Bush administration has resisted calls for a U.S. boycott of the Olympics or the event's opening ceremony. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice told The Times last week the U.S. boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics to protest the Russian invasion of Afghanistan was a "feckless" act.